

Claims 1-7, 40-46, 49-55 and 88-94 were rejected as obvious over Uyama in view of Dworkin. This rejection is respectfully traversed. These claims are not obvious over either of these references or the combination thereof.

Before proceeding with a discussion of the claim rejections, the undersigned must object to the Examiner's making the present rejection final. Specifically, of the subsisting claims, of them claims 8, 9, 47, 48, 56, 57, 95 and 96 are rejected on a new ground (obviousness) and on a previously unapplied reference (Dworkin, U.S. Patent No. 6,026,148), while at the same time making the rejection final. The Examiner thereby foreclosed the Applicants from responding to these new issues as a matter of right. In fact, a final rejection was premature and the Applicants should have been permitted their right to respond and amend at will.

As for the Examiner's rejection of the claims, the undersigned appreciates his effort in making use of claim charts. However, those charts are of questionable value if they do not reflect the claim language. For example, the "routing" step in claim 1 is represented as "routing the question to one of the experts by the user." The actual language of the claim is "routing the question to one of the experts **selected** by the user" (emphasis added). This difference is far from insignificant. In fact, this a difference which the Applicants' attorney argued specifically in the last Amendment (see the second paragraph at page 7). It is pointed out there that, in Uyama, the expert who will answer the question is determined by the subject matter: there is a predefined correlation between the subject matter of the question and the assigned expert who will answer it. In accordance with claim 1, the user selects the expert who will answer the question. It can hardly be

argued that this is an insignificant difference. There is substantial value in permitting the user to address his question to a specific expert, even if that expert is not the one selected by the system to respond to the subject matter of the question. Accordingly, on this basis alone, claim 1 is unobvious over Uyama. Dworkin discloses nothing beyond Uyama regarding this aspect of claim 1, so the claim is allowable over either of the references or their combination.

Interestingly, the Examiner not only eliminated this selection feature from the language of claim 1, but apparently also eliminated it from his consideration. His only relevant comment is that "the particular manner of expert selection is not claimed." However, expert selection is claimed, and the Examiner gave absolutely no consideration to that fact.

By referring to the marked-up version of claim 49, the Examiner will appreciate that the claim as presented in the Amendment is not consistent with the marked-up claim. In fact, it was intended to recite "one of the experts selected by the user." Through error, this amendment was not reflected in the Amendment itself. Accordingly, claim 49 has been appropriately corrected in the present amendment.

The remaining independent claims have been amended to reflect expert selection by the user. For the reasons explained above with respect to claim 1, this feature is believed to distinguish the claims patentably over Uyama, Dworkin, or their combination. Accordingly, all of the independent claims subsisting in this application are believed to be in condition for allowance.


The remaining claims in the application are believed to be allowable, based upon their dependence from an allowable claim.

It is noted that the undersigned has filed a Notice of Appeal simultaneously with this Amendment. However, it is not believed that it should be necessary for the Applicants to pursue an appeal when such a clear ground of patentability exists and the Examiner has not even considered it.

Applicants' attorney has made every effort to place this patent application in condition for allowance. It is therefore earnestly requested that the present amendment be entered, that the application as a whole receive favorable reconsideration, and that all of the claims be allowed as presently constituted. Should there remain any unanswered questions, the Examiner is requested to call the Applicants' undersigned attorney at the telephone number indicated below.

Respectfully submitted,

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PATENT TRADEMARK OFFICE

Docket No.: 3042/0G691

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re Application of: James D. MARKS ET AL.

Serial No: 09/447,259

Group Art Unit:3623

Filed: November 23, 1999

Examiner: D. Robertson

Confirmation No.: 3586

For: INTERACTIVE SYSTEM FOR MANAGING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS  
AMONG USERS AND EXPERTS

AMENDMENT MARK-UP SHEET FOR AMENDMENT RESPONSIVE TO  
OFFICE ACTION OF JULY 15, 2002

Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks  
Washington DC 20231

In the Claims:

Please amend Claims 7, 40, 49, 88, 97 and 98 to read as follows:

7. (Twice Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein receiving a command includes receiving a command to post an answer to the question and to refer the question to another one of the experts at substantially the same time.

40. (Twice Amended) A method for providing answers on one or more topics from a set of experts on each topic to questions posed by users via client interfaces in communication with a server and with the set of experts, the method comprising:

receiving at one of the client interfaces a question on the selected topic;

transmitting the question from the client interface to the server;

routing the question to a plurality of experts, at least one of them selected by the user, by posting the question in a plurality of locations, wherein each of said locations is accessible to only one expert of said set of experts;

receiving a command at the server from an expert in response to the question; and

executing the command from the expert automatically.

49. (Amended) A server for providing answers on one or more topics from a set of experts on each topic to questions posed by users in communication with client interfaces, the server being in communication with the client interfaces and the set of experts and comprising:

a question receiving component configured to receive at the server a question received from a user via one of the client interfaces;

a routing component configured to route the question to one of the experts selected [using information provided with the question] by the user, wherein said routing component is further configured to display the question with other questions for said one of the experts on the personal expert interface of said one of the experts;

a command receiving component configured to receive a command from the selected expert in response to the question; and

an executing component configured to execute the command from the selected expert automatically.

88. (Twice Amended) A system for providing answers on one or more topics from a set of experts on each topic to questions posed by users via client interfaces in communication with the server, the server comprising;

a question receiving component configured to receive at one of the client interfaces a question on the selected topic;

a transmitting component configured to transmit the question from the client interface to the server;

a routing component configured to route the question to said set of experts, at least one of them having been selected through the client interface, by posting the question in plurality of locations, wherein each of said locations is accessible to only one expert of said set of experts;

a command receiving component configured to receive a command at the server from one of the experts in response to the question; and

an executing component configured to execute the command from the selected expert automatically.

97. (Amended) A method, executed by a server, for providing answers on one or more topics from a set of experts on each topic to questions posed by users in communication with client interfaces to a plurality of fora, the server being in communication with the client interfaces and the set of experts, and the method comprising;

receiving at the server a question received from a user via one of the client interfaces;  
routing the question to one of the experts selected [using information provided with the question] by the user, wherein said routing component is further configured to display the question on the personal expert interface of said one of the experts;  
receiving a command from the selected expert in response to the question, wherein said command comprises a command to post an answer to the question selectively in at least one of a plurality of fora; and  
executing and command from the selected expert automatically.

98. (Amended) A server for providing answers on one or more topics from a set of experts on each topic to questions posed by users in communication with client interfaces to a plurality of fora, the server being in communication with the client interfaces and the set of experts and comprising:

a question receiving component configured to receive at the server a question received from a user via one of the client interfaces;

a routing component configured to route the question to one of the experts selected [using information provided with] by the user providing the question, wherein said routing component is further configured to display the question on the personal expert interface of said one of the experts;

a forum component configured to receive answers posted by said set of experts, wherein said forum component comprises a plurality of fora;

a command receiving component configured to receive a command from the selected expert in response to the question, wherein said command receiving component further comprises a post in [a] at least one of plurality of fora command receiving component configured to receive a command to post an answer to the question in at least one of a plurality of fora; and

an executing component configured to execute the command from the selected expert automatically.